

# Treasure of N. J. No. 10

By Everett Holbrook, Copyright, 1905, by Charles M. Lurie.

M. R. LOVERING'S house was only a long stone's throw from the liveliest thoroughfare in the town, where upon a pleasant evening there would be a gay parade of young folk, with no wealth of wayfarers upon sober errands, but the gleam of the lights and the hum of the voices seemed to be shut out of the side street by an invisible barrier. He who turned from the avenue plunged at once into gloom and silence under the high arch of elms. The houses stood aloof behind trees and shrubbery and were never prodigal of gas.

A breath of east wind had chilled the May evening. Verandas were deserted, and between the bustling avenue and his own doorstep Mr. Lovering saw none of his neighbors and heard no sound of them. Highwaymen and housebreakers were the subjects of his thought, and in unconscious imitation of those unobtrusive people he made a very quiet entrance into his own home. Indeed, he was already in the parlor and in the act of depositing a great bundle upon the table when his presence became known. Then his sister, Margaret, who was sitting upon the piano stool, turned toward him with a little cry, and a tall young man standing beside her halted suddenly in the midst of a pretty speech and acknowledged Mr. Lovering's wordless greeting with momentary embarrassment.

"What's all that?" asked the girl, indicating the luggage on the table.

Lovering looked down upon the bundle with grim satisfaction, while he rubbed and flexed a weary arm, but he did not answer the question. He seemed to be unable to break from his own line of meditation, and it was altogether in the manner of one who is alone that he slowly drew a revolver from his pocket and laid it carefully down. Margaret took a step forward and viewed the weapon with disfavor.

"George," said she, "is it loaded?" Her brother nodded solemnly three or four times, busying himself with the strings and wrappings of the big bundle meanwhile. There was presently disclosed a box of dark wood ostentatiously re-enforced by bands of iron, with a formidable lock and a chain linked to a staple at the back.

Woodbury, who was not a resident of that town, but only an occasional visitor at his uncle's house, adjoining Lovering's, could not conceal his curiosity at the sight of these objects.

"Perhaps you haven't heard that I've been elected treasurer of N. J. No. 10?" said Lovering, addressing the guest.

"The building loan association that my uncle belongs to? No, I hadn't heard of it."

"Such is the fact," said Lovering, "and that means that I must take care of quite a bit of money for a day or two every month. The members make their payments in the evening, as a rule. I expect some of them tonight. It's likely I may have four or five thousand dollars in hand before I go to bed. Now, a good safe costs a lot of money. I can't afford it, and No. 10 won't. So there you are. I've done the next best thing."

"A revolver never shoots the right person," said Margaret, "and it alarms



HE DREW A REVOLVER FROM HIS POCKET AND LAID IT DOWN.

only the innocent. If Aunt Martha hears that it's in the house she'll lock herself in her room and never come out. Please promise me, George, that you won't keep it loaded. And as for the money, you'd do much better to hide it than to put it in that box, where any burglar couldn't help finding it. I wouldn't trust our plated spoons to that contrivance."

Her brother made no reply. He was sitting a key into the lock of the box, and when it was open he drew forth two great gongs.

"For further security," he said, "I have purchased these, one for the back door and the other for the front door. If they work well I'll get some little ones for the windows. Just wind 'em up like a clock."

He was interrupted by the arrival of

three members of N. J. No. 10, who had come to pay considerable sums into the treasury. When he had withdrawn with these brethren into another room Margaret turned to Woodbury.

"I think this is all nonsense, don't you?" said she, waving her hand toward the strong box and the revolver.

"Eh?" said he, starting. "I beg your pardon." And then, returning to the world of unromantic fact, he studied her face. "You're not a bit nervous, are you? Not easily frightened, I mean."

"You're thinking of revolvers? I'm not timid about them from ignorance. I could take that one to pieces and put it together again, but George couldn't. And he's so nervous and absentminded! I wish he wouldn't keep the thing loaded."

"Well, I don't know," said the young man doubtfully. And then, with decision: "The fact is, Margaret, that I saw two suspicious looking men hanging around here in the early part of the evening. They certainly looked as if they were examining this residence with a view to a visit."

"I suppose we ought to tell my brother," said she. "Yet what's the use? He'll trust his money to that ridiculous box instead of hiding it, which is the only safe way. Burglars are always stupid about finding things, but when it comes to breaking locks—why, that's their trade, of course. If George would only give me the money to me and let me put it away—"

"George will take care of the money," said her brother, entering hastily. "Your trinkets are your own, Peggy, and you may hide them under a sofa pillow if you think that's the safe way, but leave the funds of the N. J. No. 10 to me." And he hurried away with the strong box under his arm.

One of his visitors had volunteered to help him with the alarm gongs and with the mooring of the box, and as the man was a carpenter the chance was too good to be lost. The box gave no trouble. It was speedily stowed away in a cupboard in the dining room closet. But the gongs presented new problems to the carpenter and kept him busy till past 11 o'clock. A few minutes later young Woodbury made his exit by a window of the parlor, not daring to risk the gong at the front door, and by midnight the house was dark except for Lovering's room, where that gentleman was preparing for bed.

Lovering was a member of the fresh air cult. His windows stood wide open, and the curtains swung wildly in the draft. Two men—the same whom Woodbury had seen lurking about in the afternoon—observed the flying curtains, and one of them climbed into a tree that had a limb extending near to one of the windows. When he descended to the ground the light had been extinguished, and Lovering was asleep.

"That guy has got a gun," the thief reported to his partner. "I seen where he put it."

"Can you win it?" said the other.

"Easy."

Half an hour later Lovering awoke from his first sleep in the grip of nameless terror. The noise of one of his curtains, snatched up with a rush by its spring, was still in his ears. He turned toward the window, and against the misty, phosphorescent brightness of the night outside he saw the black figure of a man whose arm was extended straight toward Lovering's face, and there was a dimly shining object in his hand.

"You keep quiet," said the intruder, "or you'll get a bullet! See?"

"You've got my gun!" gasped Lovering.

"Yes, I have," was the reply. "And much obliged, I'm sure."

Lovering clambered out of bed in a daze, wondering what he ought to say or do. He dared not cry out. There was no other man in the house (except the robber who had now entered by the window), and to bring Margaret or Aunt Martha or the maid upon the scene was to inaugurate a useless massacre. So he held his peace while putting on such raiment as the burglar advised.

"You don't need no coat; the keys are in your trousers."

He drove Lovering before him like a docile sheep out of the room, down the stairs and into the dining room, where he caused the master of the house to raise a window softly that the second thief might enter.

"Larry," said the first, addressing his partner, "the stuff's in that closet. Take the keys out of this feller's left hand trousers pocket."

The command was obeyed, and the closet and the cupboard were presently open, but no key upon the bunch would unlock the box, because the real key was upstairs in Margaret's room. She had found it on a table in the hall where her brother had put it down while he was busy with the gongs.

"We won't bother with this now," said the robber. "We'll kick the lid off it out in the lot. It's the same cast iron fake that we found in that house over in Springvale, ain't it, Larry?"

"Yes," responded Larry, with a grin. "Don't drop it, Joe. It'll bust. I'll get you a flatiron for the chain."

The iron was brought, and Joe with the first stroke shattered one of the big links almost to powder. Then he picked up the box under his left arm, and with the revolver in his free hand, waved Lovering toward the kitchen.

"You'll have to come with us for a little way," said he.

At that moment the whole house suddenly resounded with a most amazing clamor. Though the strong box and the chain were grossly fraudulent, the gongs (which could be tested by any purchaser) were in a measure honest, and it was the one that had been set above the back door that now fractured the whole fabric of the night.

To the thieves this was in reality the voice of a friend, but they could not know it. If the gong had not rung they would have gone out by the back way

straight into the face of Douglass Woodbury (uncle to Margaret's suitor), a man of strength, courage and lifelong skill with weapons. He was standing guard with a revolver in each hand, a dead shot with right or left, and a man peculiarly merciless toward housebreakers. Listening at the door, he had put his shoulder against it, and the pressure had set off the gong. So the thieves were warned away from certain death and fled through the house to the front door, where the younger Woodbury was posted with a double barreled shotgun which he had forgotten to cock.

Joe's hands were full, and it was Larry who unlocked and opened the door. Instantly the gong over their heads deafened and confounded them. They stood for an instant, cowed, and John Woodbury confronted them defenseless, for the gong had so startled him that he dropped his gun.

It was Joe who first recovered his wits. It was for him that moment of desperation which entraps the house-breaker to murder, the moment when life and liberty are all crowded into a single idea—a man blocking the path. Lovering, frozen as in some horrible



THE THIEF POINTED IT STRAIGHT AT WOODBURY'S HEAD.

nightmare, saw Joe whip up the revolver to within a foot of Young Woodbury's breast. The action was indescribably rapid, but Lovering had lost the sense of time. All acts for his eye were stretched out till they covered ages. He had time to think of innumerable things, of his unlucky purchase of that weapon, of the extraordinary fate by which it and the gongs also and all other features of his silly plan had turned directly against his wishes, of the love of his sister for this young man who would now be murdered before her eyes (for with the sixth sense he knew that she was standing at the head of the stairs) and of his own wretched inability to rush in and take the bullet in his own breast. Still the weapon was poised, and no flash came. How long could this agony endure?

He closed his eyes and when he opened them again Joe and Woodbury were rolling over and over upon the floor. The revolver had fallen, and the strong box too. He had now the strength to move forward, but Larry was too quick. The thief seized the weapon from the floor and pointed it

straight at Woodbury's head. There was light now from the top of the stairs and Lovering saw the hammer of the revolver rise and fall, but no explosion followed. Larry flung it down, plucked up the iron bound box, leaped over the struggling men upon the threshold and fled.

Then Father Time, who had stood on one foot in order that Lovering might have leisure to appreciate these horrors, rushed nimbly on to overtake his schedule and dragged events along with him in a giddy whirl. The elder Woodbury appeared, his hands full of pistols. Joe, the burglar, was tied up as neat as an apothecary's package; the younger Woodbury and Margaret enchanted each other with congratulations far more warm than any previous expression of sentiment between them would have seemed to warrant. All this, for Lovering, passed in a flash. He heard a jumble of explanations, how the Woodburys had decided to keep an eye upon the house and had discovered that something was amiss within, though they had not seen the actual entrance of the burglars; how Margaret had not retired, but had been sitting by her window in the dark, and a hundred other details. Then, in a pause, he found himself holding the revolver in his hands and staring at the unexploded cartridges.

"A miracle—a miracle!" he murmured.

"Not the least in the world, George," said Margaret. "I took the firing pin out. I knew you weren't to be trusted with a weapon and I couldn't merely unload it because you'd notice that the cartridges weren't there. And now," she added, turning to the Woodburys, uncle and nephew, "let's go and see if the money is safe."

"The money!" cried her brother.

"Why, that rascal ran away with it!"

"He ran away with the box," she replied. "Any thief would do that, of course. I knew it, and when I found the key I took the money and hid it. Come."

She led the way to the dining room closet, and there in a great earthen jar conspicuously labeled "Mince Meat," and out of use because of the season, they found the treasure of N. J. No. 10 reposing safely.

"Fake" Sailors A-plenty.

"Fake sailors," said a naval officer, "work more harm to the reputation of Jack ashore than the real man-of-war's man is able to overcome by the strictest regulation of his conduct when on land. The navy is popular, and its sailors are popular, and, realizing this, there has sprung up a pan-handlers' contingent whose regular business is the impersonation of Uncle Sam's bluejackets.

"Somehow they manage to get possession of castoff naval uniforms. Sometimes, failing that, they go even to the expense of having uniforms made after the naval pattern. Dressed in these, they do a profitable business. Their ship has just sailed without them, and they want money to join her at Newport or they will be court-martialed. Some want only enough money to get to the navy yard, where they must report at once. And so on with all sorts of plausible stories. When you see a man in a navy uniform begging, take my word for it he is a pan-handler and not a man-of-war's man."—New York Press.

"Bonds of Freedom."

If marriage without love is not marriage, so also love which does violence to marriage is not love. The marriage ceremony is not a proclamation of imprisonment, but of opportunity. Its bond is not a fetter, but a shield. Still, it may not be dissolved or broken. The crowning does it makes the king, you say. No, but it places upon the man whose head receives the crown the obligation to sacrifice, if need be, everything that is mortal in him to its honor.—North American Review.

A Winner.

Briggs-In Perkins successful in his philosophy? Griggs—Oh, yes. His wife has supported him for years.—Life.

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